

Deep Insight

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This article is a transcription of one of the talks given by Ajahn Brahmavamso during a 9-day meditation retreat in North Perth, April 1999.

This morning's talk is the last of the major talks of this retreat and so it's nice to talk about those things which really count. In other words, it's about the practice of deep insight to find out the way of the mind, the way of the world, and also to be able to have such insight which can really change one's way of looking at things and thereby change one's life. So this is that deep insight we're looking at, which is life-changing. And that's the sort of deep insight which the Buddha was recommending and which forms the heart of this path.

When I talked in the last few days about the Eightfold Path, in some parts of the suttas there's a Ten-fold Path. They add an extra two factors on the end. Did you know that? This is the hidden two factors of the eightfold path. We only give these secret teachings at the end of a retreat! They're not really secret at all. The ninth factor is right wisdom, right understanding, *samma-nyana*, an understanding which is not just view, but which is a real deep seeing. The tenth factor is the perfect release - freedom, *samma-vimutti*. But it's nice to add those two factors onto the end of the eightfold path. It's as if the eightfold path is what you're doing and the ninth and tenth factors are what happens as a result. By practicing the Eightfold Path you get that insight wisdom, *samma-nyana*, the clear seeing into reality. Seeing things as they truly are and not as they appear to be, or as we want them to be, but as they truly are. A result of that is the tenth factor - perfect freedom.

Those are two factors which need to be stressed in this eightfold path, or tenfold path, because they show that this eightfold path is what you do to get somewhere. And to get it through insight, through wisdom. But when people use that word "insight" they should really stress the word "in" - actually to see within, to see deep within, to see the source of things. Because so much of what people take to be "insight" is really "ex-sight", and that's why it excites you! It's seeing outside somewhere. And that's why it sort of stimulates the mind instead of settling it. If it really is true insight it makes you very peaceful and calm. So there's a difference there and again, the main reason why people don't get those deep insights is because their mind is not calm enough, not powerful enough to see deeply within themselves. And that's why traditionally, in Buddhism, to gain that sort of insight we say the Five Hindrances [1] have to be overcome first of all. That's the whole job of the Eightfold Path, if you like, to overcome the five hindrances, and to get the mind in that sort of state that it's clear and it's powerful, and it can discover insight. So the insight is the result of the Eightfold Path - and I'm talking about the big insight now.

And so to overcome those five hindrances that I've been talking about, you've seen very clearly in the last eight or nine days that there's something you should know about - the hindrances, their power, and just how sneaky they are sometimes. Just when you think that you're getting peaceful, sometimes a thought might come up, a desire, a wanting, and that's a hindrance which stops you getting into deep meditation. Or sometimes a little bit of ill-will towards yourself which manifests as impatience - that's a form of ill-will. And to see those and hindrances shows you how insidious and difficult are these hindrances to overcome. And to gain insight, all the teachers, all the texts, all say that without abandoning the five hindrances there's no insight, there's no wisdom. So that should be one's preliminary job, to overcome these five hindrances. And the way those five hindrances are overcome is what I've been teaching here this week, the *jhanas*. Traditionally, they say that where the five hindrances are overcome is called *upacara samadhi*. They call it "neighbourhood concentration", neighbourhood *samadhi*, where you're just right next to *jhanas* but not fully in them. It's like the entrance to this hall over here, you have to pass over the entrance, the neighbourhood, to come into this room. And also you have to pass over it as you go out. These are *upacaras*, neighbourhoods.

One of the mistakes which people make with understanding insight meditation, is that they think the neighbourhood as you go into *jhana* is a place where you should do insight. Just stop a bit short of *jhana* and try and do insight there. And that is one type of *upacara*, but that is a very difficult one and very unstable, because you're not really quite sure whether those five hindrances have been overcome or not. You're not really sure if you're in that *upacara samadhi* where insight can truly happen because those hindrances are extremely sneaky at that stage, they can manifest just so easily. And also if there is a state just before *jhana*, because of the way of the mind it's very unstable, and you can fall back so quickly. And that is why some people misunderstand, or fail to recognise, that there are two *upacaras* - there is the one on the way in to *jhana* and there is the one on the way out of *jhana*. In the same way you pass over the threshold of that door on the way in, and also on the way out. And of those two, it's that *upacara samadhi* after *jhana* which has the qualities of being certain and long-lasting. Having trained yourself in this way, you know what *jhanas* are, and you know that state just afterwards is what the texts call the *upacara samadhi*. And from your experience you will know that state lasts much, much longer, is much more stable, than any *upacara samadhi* just before you arrive. It's because when you are experiencing the *jhanas*, when you're right inside them, it's as if the five hindrances have been completely knocked out and made unconscious. You've slugged them, and the longer you stay in that *jhana*, the deeper the slug! So much so that when you come out of the *jhanas*, they are still knocked out - unconscious, inactive. You've beaten them down. And very often if you spend a long time in a *jhana* they're beaten down for a long, long time. And anyone who's had a very nice meditation, especially a *jhana*, will know that the state afterwards, the happiness, the joy, lasts a long time, effortlessly, because

you're full of energy, clarity, power. And that is the state where insight can be found, where insight is made.

You have to be careful, sometimes, of that state after jhanas, because sometimes the experience is so powerful and so beautiful, and sometimes the hindrances are knocked out for days. Sometimes for days after you get a nice jhana, you have no desire for things of the world. Even the food on your plate you can take or leave and you don't really care. And you have no sloth or torpor - you can sit until late in the night, get up early in the morning, you're just so mindful, perfectly, hour after hour, day after day. There's no ill-will that can come up: even if a mosquito comes you sort of welcome it - "please come and take some of my blood! Out of compassion for all the other people out there, come on take some!". You get so much compassion because the mind is so high and full of joy. And sometimes people think that those states are full enlightenment.

You know, I wrote about it in that book "Seeing the Way" [2]. I had a nice meditation one evening and after that I just wasn't tired at all. When I lay down to sleep I was so mindful that I didn't really need to sleep. Just laying there on my side watching the breath gave so much happiness, was so peaceful. When I did go off to sleep, it was only for a very short time, and I woke up afterwards and immediately was just so mindful. Not like it was this morning - not "oh, here we go again! What shall we do, where am I?!" - but completely mindful in getting up and going to the hall before three o'clock, before the bell, and sitting meditation there and just going into nice samadhi all morning. It was great. And I thought "at last, this is it, oh great!". And it's nice to think you're enlightened - it's quite a nice way to start the day!

Some of you who know this story know what happened next... when I went on alms round I was just perfectly mindful, there were no defilements in the mind at all, it was just so clear. Until it came to the meal time. And meals are very good if you've got any defilements coming up, especially if it's the only meal of the day and that's all you're going to get. And I was in a monastery in the north-east of Thailand, a very poor monastery away from the cities or towns, and usually we used to get the same meal every day, day after day. It was sticky rice and what they called rotten fish curry. And it was called rotten fish for two reasons - first of all it was fish which was pickled, caught during the rainy season and put in a jar and closed up and left to ferment. So it was like "ripe" fish. And it was also rotten because that was how it tasted! It was really awful stuff - you got sort of used to it but not really used to it. And so you'd have this every day - rotten fish curry with your rice, and that was all you had. But this one day it just happened after I became "enlightened", somebody made us this pork curry (there was no vegetarian food in those places) as well as the rotten fish curry, and as soon as I saw this I thought "I'm going to have something nice to eat today". And the abbot (I was second in line), this Thai monk, he took these really big scoops of this pork curry, huge scoops, and put it in his bowl. And I thought that was really greedy, but it didn't matter because there was plenty left for me. But what he did next was, after taking out two huge scoops for himself (and he didn't take any of the rotten fish curry - even he didn't like it!)... he said "well, it's all the same isn't it, whatever curry it is, it's just the four elements" and then he poured all the curries together and mixed them up. And I thought "if you really thought that, then why didn't you mix them up before you took yours! Now I haven't got any nice food today". And I got really angry at this monk, really livid at him, thinking "how can you do this, taking away my nice meal. It's not every day we get this nice pork curry. And you're a north-easterner - I've come from the West, I'm not used to rotten fish, you should be used to rotten fish. Now you've mixed it all up!" And what stopped me from getting more and more angry was the thought "hang on, I'm supposed to be enlightened!" And that really makes you depressed, when you find out that you're not enlightened after all. That spoiled my whole day!

But that's what happens sometimes, because for many hours the defilements are just gone, and you're just so clear and bright and you think "wow, this is it, this is the way it should be". Perfectly clear and peaceful and light. But it's not, it's just samadhi experience. So, be careful sometimes that you don't come back and say that you're enlightened because little things like the hindrances will, sooner or later, when they've recovered, come up and will play with you again, take you around by the nose.

But the important thing with that upacara samadhi which is after jhana, that is the time to really get into deep insight, because your mind is powerful. The mind has energy, it has clarity, and the five hindrances aren't there. This is the time when you can see what you don't want to see, what you don't expect to see, because all that wanting and all that expecting has been subdued. And you know it's been subdued because you've gained that jhana. I think many of you know how expectations and wants are the very barriers which stop you getting those nimittas and entering samadhi. And so by training yourself to subdue those wants and expectations, those desires, they are knocked cold, they disappear, you enter jhana, and when you come out again they're still not around. Because there's no wanting, there's no expectations, you can see what's truly there rather than what you see or what you expect to see. That's where deep insight arises. The expectations are as much a hindrance to jhanas as they are to insight. That's why, when insight happens (this is one of the characteristics of it) it'll always be something which you never expected. Quite different than what you thought it would be. That's why it's called an insight - you're seeing something from a fresh angle, something new, something completely different.

However, there are ways of encouraging those insights to happen, especially after the jhanas. And the way to encourage them, in the words of the Buddha is to get the jhanas and then standing on that experience, develop the insights into anicca, dukkha, anatta. The three characteristics of impermanence, suffering and not-self. "Standing on that experience", using that experience both as your power source and also as your data to investigate these three areas of reality. And those three areas, again, are impermanence (it's wider than impermanence - I'll mention more about anicca), suffering and not-self.

The impermanence, the first thing one can really watch, is the uncertainty of everything. Because one of the meanings of nicca, the opposite to anicca, is something which is certain, which is regular, something you can rely upon. So the opposite means that things which are there will suddenly disappear, unreliable, irregular. And it's interesting contemplating that word, anicca - unreliable, because how often do we seek for something to rely upon in this world. Some little place of security, something we think is always going to be there for us to come home to, either physically or mentally. Some sort of refuge, inside the mind or

inside the world, a place of safety or a thing of security. What anicca is doing is saying that all of "that" is insecure, is insubstantial, is irregular, and you cannot rely upon it. The tendency of the human being is maybe to admit that a lot of the world is unreliable but to seek some sort of secure place, or secure person or secure mind state, which you think is secure and is always going to be there. That's why some people look for partners in the world, someone you can rely upon, someone who's always going to be there for you, a soul-mate. But all soul-mates eventually disappear, they go, they too are unreliable, as you find out when you marry one!

But not only that, but people also rely on places and things, the little hide-aways, the nice little houses, the little nests. And even those are unreliable. Eventually they will disappear as well. But we also have the little nests inside of our minds, some little place that we rely upon. But even that, anicca, when it gets in there, reveals that even that is insecure. That's why anicca, when you see it clearly, is quite frightening. It brings up the feeling of complete insecurity. There's no place where you can stand. No place where you can sit down. Everything is always changing. And because of the fear which arises when one starts to look at anicca, it means that unless you've got the powerful mind-states of jhanas or post-jhanas, you'll never be able to pass through that fear and see through to reality. There'll always be some part of existence you'll think is secure, reliable, permanent. And that's why we aren't enlightened.

Sometimes we think it's not very nice to realise insecurity, but it's wonderful to realise the truth of insecurity for two reasons. One, because when you know you haven't got a home (in all senses of that word), then you can be like a bird, you can fly everywhere. Every place is a tree where you can rest for a while. You'll never think that you own that particular tree, that "that's mine and the other birds should keep out". You can share. Two, it also means that when you realise that all these things are completely changing, then when they do change, when they do disappear, when things alter, you're never surprised. You realise that this is actually the truth of things, that their insecurity is actually a freedom. Security is like being in prison, being bonded to something. So after a while, one gets quite a sense of release with insecurity, a sense of being able to fly and being able to go where one wishes rather than being bound down.

And so this is what happens when we look at anicca, it gives us a sense that all this is coming and going, that there's nothing which is stable, no place that we can rest on. But in particular, the anicca which is going to discover the third aspect of the three characteristics of existence, anatta, that is the anicca which is very difficult to apply. That's anicca which applies to the one who sees anicca. Sometimes to see the one who's seeing is just so difficult - it's like trying to catch an eel, it's so slithery and slippery. As soon as you catch it it's slipped away again. Or it's like a dog trying to catch its tail. The self trying to see the self. And this is why seeing anicca in the doer and the seer is just so hard to do. This is, again, one of the reasons why we can't do this is because we don't want to do it, we don't like to do it, we'd rather not see the insubstantiality of everything. It's just too frightening, it's just too challenging, it's just cutting too deep. So the only way that can actually happen is if after a good meditation, which is just so peaceful, and we're so happy and joyful, that that happiness and joy overcomes any fear and we can go so deep into insight.

In the same way, and you've heard me tell you this before, the only way you can be open to hearing things you don't want to hear, to criticism for example, is when you're in a good mood. If you're in a really good mood and you're really high, then I can tell you anything which is wrong with you, even personal things, and you don't mind. That's why I tell people who are in relationships with husbands and wives, if there's something very difficult you have to tell your partner, some criticism which you think they might not really take very well, then take them out to dinner, dress up really nicely, take them out to a really nice dinner, give them the very best food, what they really like, and then, when they're on the last course, when they're really nice and happy, all soft and smiley, you can tell them anything and they'll accept it. You can give all sorts of criticism, which is personal or otherwise, and because they're happy and relaxed, they can listen, they don't feel challenged. But if you tell them when they've just come home from work after a hard day, then "that's it, I'm calling the lawyers, this is divorce!" This is what happens because when you're feeling happy and when you're feeling relaxed, you're more open to seeing or hearing what you don't want to hear or see.

In the same way, when you've had a good meditation, everything's nice and peaceful, you've got so much happiness, then you're much more open to seeing those insights which you would normally never allow yourself to contemplate. There's no-one here. Life is suffering. Everything is impermanent. Those are challenging. Take the suffering of life. This goes completely against the grain. "Life is beautiful. Life is a bowl of cherries. Life is out there for you to enjoy. Go out and experience. If you can't actually go there, then get a video on it". There's so many ways to enjoy yourself in this world - they've even got virtual reality now. Soon, you'll be able to get virtual jhanas! Just put on this little mask, push a button, and all these beautiful nimittas will come up and lead you into virtual jhanas! So you don't have to sit on the floor and waste all these nine or ten days, just do it in half an hour at a virtual reality store. I'm sure that someone will try that one of these days. But that's not the way it works. We'd like to have it the easy way, but sometimes it takes a lot of giving up and letting go. But actually to see suffering is to see something that, by its very nature, we don't want to see.

I was talking about perceptions the other day, actually right throughout the retreat. There was a very fascinating experiment done, I think it was at Harvard, to examine the way the mind perceives things, where they flashed images up on the screen. They got a few volunteer students to sit and see what was going on, with a notepad by their side. First of all they flashed these images up so fast that there wasn't really time to understand them - they were just a flash on the screen. And they asked these students to write down what they perceived. And all they could see was, like, a flash of light - that's all. Then they increased the exposure on the screen, from one-hundredth of a second to, say, two-hundredths of a second. They still only saw a flash. And they kept on increasing the time of exposure on the screen incrementally until there was a flash there and they could catch something, they could perceive something, then they could write down what it was. And they kept on increasing it until they could see it more clearly and write down what it was. Some very interesting things happened when they kept on increasing the exposure more and

more and more. At a very early exposure length, when they thought they understood what was there, they continued writing the same thing, kept on seeing it in exactly the same way. One example was when the actual photograph was a bicycle on the stairs going up to one of the lecture halls. One of the students perceived it as a ship. It's quite easy to do this because it was only shown very quickly, and perception just grasps something and they said it was a ship. The interesting thing was that as the exposure time was increased, incrementally, he still said it was a ship. And at times, when every person who was exposed at that particular length would say it's a bicycle on the stairs, they would still see it as a ship. The old perceptions had imprinted themselves on the mind they actually saw that image according to their old views. And it took them a really long exposure on the screen to change their old ideas and say "it's not really a ship, it's a bicycle on the steps going to a lecture hall".

What was interesting there was how, through the perceptions that we have, we form these really strong views, which make us see the whole world to conform to those views, even though they're completely wrong. That's why it's so difficult to catch the

illusions of self, the illusions of suffering, the illusions of anicca. We need to have that strong exposure, not just for a second but for long periods of time, to see that we've been seeing it in the wrong way. It's not a ship after all, it's just a bicycle on the steps. It's not a self after all, it's just a process. Life is not such a bowl of cherries, life is a bowl of rotten eggs!

And the other interesting thing about this experiment, is that they found that images which were repulsive, which were abhorrent, took people much longer exposures to see them as they really are. One of the images they showed on the screen was of two copulating dogs. And that took the longest of all the images for them to figure out what it really was. The reason was because they didn't want to see that - that was repulsive. If it had been an image of, like, a beautiful model, they would have seen that in a few seconds. But they didn't want to see it and therefore they didn't want to see it. And that was really fascinating because that was reinforcing what the Buddha's been saying for, like, twenty five centuries. That with the hindrances operating, we only see what we want to see. We don't see what's real. And sometimes the exposure need to be so long and right in front of our face before we truly admit what's going on in the world.

But with suffering, this is the problem - we don't want to see suffering, therefore we don't see it. We live in a fantasy world, that life is happy, that you get married and you're happy ever after. You get the perfect relationship. I remember one lady kept on telling me, no matter what I said to her about Buddhism, she said "I know he's out there somewhere - the perfect man for me. It's just that I have not met him yet. I don't know where he is, but I know he's out there somewhere". And she was in her late forties and she still said stupid things! People live in fantasy land most of the time - not real at all. Or the people that think that if you get the right medicines then you never need to die, and that aging is something that is healable, curable, something which is not necessary. All these ideas, the fantasies which people have, are just not being real.

So when we start looking at the truth of dukkha, we have to be very courageous to see that. Not just courageous, but we have to be very sneaky as well. And again, this is why we do something like the jhana meditations, because we feel so happy, so peaceful (like the husband or wife who's been taken out by their partner to a beautiful dinner), and the feeling's so rested, so at peace, that we're actually open to seeing or hearing what we don't want to hear, what we didn't want to see. That's how you sneak up on dukkha, and you can finally accept it. There's one particular area of dukkha which we don't want to see - at least we think that we're happy. That's why when you go home from this retreat, doesn't matter how much suffering you have on a retreat, when you go home again you say it was really worthwhile, it was really good. Because you'd look like such a fool if you said it was really terrible, full of suffering, that you spent all this money on this. Even on retreats where you have to go through a lot of physical pain, you get conned into saying that it was a lot of pain but that you discovered something wonderful. If you didn't say that you'd be really embarrassed that you'd been wasting this time.

It's the same as when you go on holiday. Everyone who goes on holiday, when they come back afterwards and their friends ask "how was it?", they say they had a wonderful time. Even though you're lying through your teeth. Even though you had a terrible time. Because it makes you sound so foolish if you say you had a terrible time going through customs, the hotel was rotten, it rained all the time, that you had arguments with the person you went with... you'd feel such a fool! And also it's just not done, it's not our custom. Everyone knows that when you come back from a holiday you say you had a really wonderful time. Everyone knows that you write a postcard to your friends saying "having a wonderful time, wish you were here". No-one says "having a rotten time, wish I was back home!" So sometimes just be careful of the ways that we lie.

We don't face reality because of our social conditioning. It's the same as if you go to a funeral. I've been giving funeral services for a long time. Even for me, it took many years to get up the courage to tell a joke at a funeral service. You know that I like telling jokes. Because it's not done to tell jokes at funeral services. You can do it at some other time, any other time, but the one time you're not meant to tell a joke is when there's a stiff in the coffin! It's being disrespectful, isn't it? But actually when I did get the courage to do it, all the people said "Thank you so much. It made us feel good and the person who died was always telling jokes and they would have really appreciated that one." I'm sure I could hear the coffin rattling as they were laughing!

But we have these taboos which are incredibly difficult to break. One of those taboos is facing up to that life is suffering. That's a taboo that people don't want to recognise. And that's why you have to creep up on it and find that all this world is all suffering. You know the taboo of looking at a sunset or beautiful flower and, it's really challenging to say that all flowers, even the most beautiful flower, is suffering. People think you're just crazy or you're weird, or you've been a monk too long, and you should come back into the real world! It's a taboo - flowers are beautiful, everyone knows that. The sunset is so wonderful, the mountains, the forests...

To challenge that is very difficult to do. So this is where you do need to have that ability to go against preconceived notions

which go so deep inside of you, you wouldn't believe just how deeply they are embedded in you. And the most deeply embedded notion is not the idea that "life is happiness", but that "you are". That's the deepest notion which is the hardest one to eradicate, the anatta, that "I am". And that view is just so tricky, so slippery, it's just like trying to shoot a bird a million miles away through the eye with an arrow. It's just so tricky to see this self, this "me". And this is why the Buddha gave, not just the jhanas to give the mind power, and to be able to see what it doesn't want to see, but he also gave the four satipatthanas, as a way of not wasting time, to be able to focus on the four areas where the illusion of self really hangs out. Because there's many places where you might try to look for the illusion of self, but the four main areas are the rupa, your body, vedana, the feelings, citta, the mind which knows, and the mental objects, dhamma, especially the doer, will. Those are the four areas. And so, having heard a teaching like the satipatthana, having practiced the Eightfold Path, when the mind is in jhanas and it comes out afterwards see if you can remember to employ the satipatthana, especially for one purpose and one purpose only: not to see anicca, but to see anatta, not-self. That is the deepest, most fundamental block which is stopping you from being enlightened, which stops you being free.

One of the ways which I practice myself, and teach other people to practice, is to ask yourself a question. Not "is there a self?", that's just too philosophical. But to ask yourself: -"What do I take to be my self? Who do I think I am? Who do I perceive I am? What is this "me" I assume to exist?" When you ask that question, whatever comes up as an answer, challenge it. Am I this body? I look in the mirror each morning and smile "there I am again". Is that me, this body? Sometimes we're very sophisticated intellectually and we think "of course I'm not my body". On the thought level we might say that, but when we get sick or we're dying we realise that that's just superficial wisdom. It hasn't gone deep enough. We are still attached to our body. We still think it's ours.

The Buddha gave a test to see if you really are attached to these things, whether you think they're "mine". This is a story of when he was walking with some monks in the Jeta Grove and he pointed out some twigs and leaves on the ground and he said "Monks, what would happen, how would you feel if some people came along and collected all these twigs and leaves and put them into a big heap, and then set fire to them all? And then once the fire had died down, they took all the ashes and threw them to the four winds until they were completely dispersed. What would your reaction be if they did that?" And the monks said "Nothing, because these things aren't ours, they don't belong to us. They're just sticks and leaves, that's all". "Very good", said the Buddha, "Now monks, what would happen if the lay people took all of you and put you in a heap and set you on fire, until you're just ashes, and then threw those ashes to the four winds, would you be upset? Would you be really worried?" And according to the texts, I don't know if they really meant this but they certainly knew the right answer, the monks replied "No, no, we wouldn't be at all worried!" And the Buddha asked "Why is that monks?" And they said "Because this body isn't ours, it's nothing to do with us, it's not me or mine."

Now that's a test to see if you really see this body as a self, whether you're willing to let it go or not. That's why, when we say, look at the body in the four satipatthanas, don't run over that too quickly, don't just say "I've done that one already, I know this body isn't me or mine, it's just bones, it's just flesh, I've seen that in the documentaries, I've seen that in the photographs." Be careful, because you've been living with this body so closely for so many years, there's a little sneaky attachment which has gotten in there, and you really think that this is you. And that gets challenged through old-age, sickness and death. And if you tremble at sickness or pain, if you tremble at the thought of old-age or death, you still need to do some more body contemplation.

So, when a big jhana happens, and then afterwards, say "what do I take myself to be?" Look at this body and see those little attachments, even though they might be stupid, they were something that you could not see because you did not want to see it. And eradicate, completely, the idea that the body is yours or you. It's just nature, it just belongs to nature, you've got nothing much to do with it.

The second thing, about vedana, the sensations, don't take them too lightly. It's just as obvious that this isn't me. Every time you have happiness, or pain, do you automatically think "this is my happiness, this is me feeling it"? If you do, again you haven't seen the truth of anatta. After jhanas, look closely at this whole play of vedana, and you see it's just like the play of light and shadows, cast by the trees and the leaves. Where there's light there's no shadow, where there's shadow there's no light. As the leaves move in the wind, as the sun goes over, what was light is now shadow and what is shadow is now light. What is pain is

now pleasure. What was beauty is now ugliness, what was ugliness is now beauty. This is the play of vedana, it's no more than that. Seeing that means, if you see it fully through the power of jhanas, that you've done the second satipatthana and you are completely detached. Detached means that there is no-one holding on to the vedana, the pleasure or pain.

Remember, a lot of people think that attachment is all about what's out there. The cause of attachment is not so much what's out there, it's what's holding on inside. The claw, I call it. It's a claw inside which keeps on going outside into the world and attaching to particular things. No matter how many times you put things down, you let go, and let go and let go, you'll never be able to end attaching until you see that claw and cut it off. It's the claw which needs to be looked at, seen, and eradicated. That's the only way to stop attaching once and for all. And that claw is the illusion that all these things belong to us, especially vedana. To see that this is just the play of nature. In the same way that a person who understands why there is light and why there is shadow under a tree realises that it's nothing to do with them. They leave the light and shadow alone, knowing that if they prefer one or the other then soon it will change. If you prefer suffering or if you prefer happiness, it doesn't matter, it'll just change and then go it'll go back again. Up and down, coming and going, that's pleasure and pain in life. So after the jhana, you do the second satipatthana, you investigate this vedana, seeing it as it truly is, not as you want it to be, realising it's completely out of your control no matter how wise, skilful or powerful you are. The idea of getting just pleasant vedana and avoiding the unpleasant, you see, is a complete impossibility, it goes against nature, it cannot be done. So you give up, you let go.

Also, one of the deeper places where a person thinks they exist (and I've already mentioned this) is the will. And that's part of the fourth satipatthana, the doer, the chooser. That's a very hard thing to see. You can see its results, with all of the controlling, the disturbing, which has been going on for the last nine days, caused by this thing - the doer. But even so, it's so hard to give this thing up. Even so, that you know that letting go is a way into jhana, but you can't somehow achieve that letting go, you can't do the letting go. And once I describe it that way it's obvious why you can't "do" the letting go... you have to allow it to happen. The biggest problem that people have with the jhanas is that they try and "do" it, they try and control it, they try and will it, they try and steer their vehicle into a jhana. You've got to have your hands completely off the steering wheel. In fact, you've got to dismantle the steering wheel before you get into jhanas. There's an entry fee to jhanas, something you have to give up at the door, and that's "you". A lot of people would like to go into jhanas but they'd like to be there at the same time. They want to take the doer in there, to have control. And that's why they can't get in. That's why it takes "something" to get into a jhana. You see the beautiful jhana in there but you want to take "you" with you. And you can't. So after a while, you leave "you" outside and go in and have fun. Then you realise just how "you", the doer, has been such a burden, such a terrible companion for you, causing all kinds of pain and suffering. That's what the Buddha called "the house-builder".

Once you've been in a jhana you'll never trust this doer so much again. You never trust that within you which is, even now, trying to do something, think something, say something, control something. That doer, to see that is not you, is completely caused, arises and passes away according to natural laws. If you can see that then you've got a very powerful insight. Half, fifty percent, of the illusion of self is then completely gone, and life becomes so much easier. You can flow with things rather than always controlling them, because you haven't got faith in the doer any more. You can let go.

The last place, which is hard for a person to see, is the consciousness itself, the mind. This mind which a lot of people talk about, which I talk about a lot, to actually see it in its purity is very, very difficult. You see it in jhanas. What's important after having a jhana is having known what the citta is, the mind. What the Buddha talked so much about in the suttas, having seen that then to apply the satipatthana. Reflect on the mind and ask yourself "is this me?" That which knows, that which is hearing this, which feels all the aches and pains in the body, which sees the sights around, which sees the flowers and the sunsets, that which sees and experiences. "Is that what I take to be me?" And look at this whole process of consciousness, the screen on which experience is played out. Like the television simile which I gave yesterday. A television is a screen on which all these images from all these channels are played out. When we're looking at the images we cannot really be noticing the screen. When it's just images there, the screen has disappeared. We're just focussing on the images. When the five senses are playing around, that's all we see. We cannot see the screen on which all these images are being played out.

In jhanas, you see the screen, and also you start to see the screen dismantle itself. The screen which we call consciousness begins to disappear. Higher and higher in the jhanas, more of the screen goes, until in the last of the jhanas, nirodha - cessation, is the cessation of the screen. Consciousness is now gone. To see the consciousness going is a very powerful experience. According to the suttas, anyone who experiences that state, the cessation of consciousness through these jhanas (I don't mean the cessation of consciousness through going to sleep at night!), when you emerge from that state you're either a non-returner or a

fully-enlightened Arahant. There are only those two possibilities. Because having seen the cessation of consciousness itself, you will never, ever, it's impossible, to be able to take that as a self, as a me. You've seen that thing, the thing we were talking about yesterday, the claw (that's a good simile which I should have mentioned yesterday... you know the "thing" in the Addam's family, the hand, always grabbing onto things? That's attachment. That thing is attachment), consciousness or the doer, is not you, it cannot be. And the last citadel of the illusion of self is broken into, seen to be empty, and then you know that that which you took to be a self for so long was just an empty process, that's all.

That insight into anatta is the insight which arises in a stream-winner, entering the stream. It's the insight which sees that you have taken something to be the self, something to be me or mine for so many years, and you just could not see it before but now you can. That's what insight is. And again that insight is very beautiful and wonderful, because once you realise that there's no-one here then the whole idea of nibbana being just a flame going out, never scares you any more. Instead of being something completely stupid and awful, something you're not really interested in at all... because after all, what's the point of being enlightened if you're not there to enjoy it? What's the point of just snuffing out and going? There's too many things to do in the world! Too many things to achieve, too many things to experience. But the idea of nibbana as just snuffing out, going out, only makes sense and become attractive, becomes the obvious thing, only when one sees the truth of not-self. There's no-one here anyway. That which you take to be you is just an illusion. Once you see that then that is the insight, the powerful deep insight, upon which all the subsequent insights which lead to the higher states of enlightenment are based. This is what one should be doing, this is the purpose of jhanas, the purpose of all those reflections.

To ask yourself, "What do I take to be me? Who do I think I am? What do I perceive, think and view of myself?" in terms of the four satipatthanas. The afterwards you become enlightened. And if you think, those people have had happiness or jhanas or nimittas during this retreat, if you think that's happiness, then wait until you get into a nice, powerful, enlightenment insight. That's much more happiness. So the best is yet to come.

So that's insight, and what's actually happening, through the factors of the Eightfold Path you get samma-nyana, the correct deep insights, and samma-vimutti, freedom.

[1] Five Hindrances: sensual desire, ill-will, sloth and torpor, restlessness, and doubt.

[2] Seeing the Way - Buddhist Reflections on the Spiritual Life. Amaravati Publications, U.K., 1989

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